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## Introduction: Debating the Anatomical Votive

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Consider the following scenes. The first involves a visit to the Asclepieion on the south slope of the Acropolis at Athens, during the early third century BC. Upon entering the monumental temple of Asclepius we meet a number of men in the process of taking an inventory of the items arranged on the walls and in the rafters as well as those placed directly on to the cult statue itself. Eventually, they tell us, the results of their survey are to be inscribed on a large, rectangular slab of marble which will be set up somewhere in the vicinity of the temple (*IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1534A; Aleshire, 1989, p. 166). Following the men as they work their way around the darkened sacred space, their attention piqued by items made of precious metal, our own eyes take in the gold and silver of the cult statue against the west wall and the objects which cluster around it, those which sit on or hang from the rafters, cross-beams and ridge-beam of the roof and others arranged in rows on the walls to right and left (Aleshire, 1991, pp. 42–3). The inventory makers make notes about models and relief images of eyes, ears, mouths, an abdomen, a silver hand, a jaw, legs and male and female bodies, sometimes recording their weight and consequent economic value (Aleshire, 1991, pp. 199–200). Although the inventory makers pay them scant attention we can also make out objects made of less precious materials. Amongst these, clustered largely on the lower levels of the right-hand wall, are a number of stone models and reliefs depicting human body parts including breasts, genitalia and feet (van Straten, 1981, pp. 106–8; Aleshire, 1991, p. 45). The scene is reminiscent of a similar arrangement within the Asclepieion of Corinth where relief plaques featuring breasts, genitals, ears and eyes as well as terracotta arms, hands, feet and legs

moulded in the round can be seen suspended from nails or leather thongs, with others freestanding or placed against a wall (Roebuck, 1951, p. 116) (Figure I.1).

[Insert Figure I.1 here – portrait]

Figure I.1      Terracotta votive body parts dedicated at the Asclepieion of Corinth shown hanging from nails and resting on shelves as they may once have been displayed in the sanctuary.

*Source:* Courtesy of [www.HolyLandPhotos.org](http://www.HolyLandPhotos.org).

In our second scene we find ourselves wandering the winding streets of the medieval town of Arezzo, Italy. It is 1493 and our stroll brings us to a shop specialising in the sale of religious items made from wax. Upon entering we find the shop filled with objects including, according to the owner's inventory, anatomical models in the form of 'heads, eyes, teeth, chests, breasts, arms, hands, legs, feet, hearts, swaddled babies ... in large, small and medium sizes' (Holmes, 2009, p. 161). Many of these items, says the owner, will subsequently find their way into local churches where they will be left as material testimonies to miraculous acts of healing (Holmes, 2009, p. 163; Thompson, 2005, pp. 214–15) (Figure I.2).

[Insert Figure I.2 here – portrait]

Figure I.2      Seventeenth century woodcut showing an altar surmounted by a statue of the Virgin surrounded by votive offerings including hearts, swaddled babies, crutches, legs and arms. In the foreground sick or troubled people are praying. Wellcome Library Iconographic Collection 643133i.

*Source:* Wellcome Library, London.

Finally, we are transported to the twenty first century, to the sanctuary of Santa Quitéria das Frexeiras in north-eastern Brazil where we encounter an ordinary looking building painted sky blue with a roof of brown terracotta tiles (Terra, 2014). Inside the building the walls are covered – one might even say cluttered – with offerings: paintings, drawings, photographs, clothing, flowers, posters, crutches and, most strikingly of all, a series of wooden carvings of human figurines and body parts. Into one wall is set an arched doorway opening into the area containing the altar to the martyr. This wall is covered with near life-sized hands, arms and legs made from heavily varnished wood (Figure I.3). Shelves lining other walls bear individualised busts, breasts and feet, some of which carry painted names, along with terracotta models recreating scenes from the modern operating theatre.

[Insert Figure I.3 here – portrait]

Figure I.3      Wooden anatomical votives in the shape of arms, legs, hands and feet in the sanctuary of Santa Quitéria das Frexeiras, Brazil.

*Source:* Image courtesy of Anna Terra.

All of the dedicated (or yet to be dedicated) objects described in these scenes are by definition the same: they are all examples of *ex-votos*. They are offerings (*donaria* or *anathema*) given as part of a ritual request for divine intervention in the human realm. Within these scenarios we can detect other broad similarities: in all three the human body is represented in complete or fragmented form and these anatomical models appear as dedications alongside objects which take a variety of other shapes. Similarly, all of these objects are offerings dedicated (or soon to be dedicated) in a sacred setting – be that a temple, Christian church or shrine – to the inhabitants of a divine world. But, at the same time, these three scenes overflow with diversity and creativity. Most noticeably of all the materiality of

each of these offerings is different, ranging from precious metals with an economic value determined by their weight to comparatively inexpensive but durable materials such as terracotta and stone, as well as items moulded or carved from malleable but ultimately perishable substances including wax and wood. The gods or sacred figures to whom these objects are (or are to be) devoted range from an ancient god of healing to a Christian martyr. As a consequence the processes, rituals and religious knowledge produced and experienced when dedicating or encountering each of these dedicatory contexts remains substantially different. Indeed, look closely and the list of differences perhaps outweighs the similarities: some involve the written word, others do not; some will remain on view, others will be periodically cleared away perhaps even deliberately disposed of or destroyed. Despite these fundamental differences which serve to emphasise the great variety of practice and changing tradition associated with offerings of all types one thing unites all of the examples given above: all of the offerings which reference the human body can be described as ‘anatomical votives’.

### **Getting Off on the Right Foot: Defining Anatomical Votives**

But what *is* an anatomical votive? Despite the broad similarities noted above, a critical reading of the three scenarios sketched out here suggests that answering this question may be far from straightforward, especially once the historical, religious, social and cultural contexts in which these objects are (or were) used is brought into the picture. Nevertheless, at a most fundamental level an anatomical votive is defined customarily as an *ex-voto* – a gift of thanks made to a divine being – which directly references the human body usually, but not always, by means of visual representation (see for example Dasen, 2012). More specifically anatomical votives, both past and present, are categorised as dedicated objects which display or take the form of recognisable *parts* of the body’s interior or exterior, most commonly its

individual elements (or sometimes pairs of body parts in the case of eyes, ears and breasts) which are depicted as isolated, detached or fragmented from the somatic whole. They include models and relief images of limbs, eyes, ears, hands, genitals, hearts, bladders, uteri, intestines, lungs and a wide range of other parts of the body which are notable largely because they are represented as autonomous objects. It is this which marks out anatomical votives as a category of offering distinct from those which take the form of full-length standing or seated statues and figurines which represent the complete and non-fragmented human body. Traditional definitions of anatomical votives therefore focus on the intentional fragmentation or dismemberment of the human form (although see Hughes, 2008, pp. 222–3 for a compelling critique of this assumption).

It is this rather crude definition based principally on the appearance and form of a dedication which allows us to make connections between the ancient Greek, medieval and modern examples cited above. It also makes it possible to identify the occurrence of similar votive objects within a range of other historical and modern religious practices, including those of the ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman cultural worlds, the many denominations of modern Christianity (such as Roman Catholicism and the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches), Islam and Hinduism. In many respects the anatomical *ex-votos* which continue to be dedicated at modern shrines and holy places in association with almost the whole gamut of World Religions are similar in nature to their ancient counterparts, at least when comparisons are based on their form alone. Look beyond this, however, and the picture becomes more complicated. Modern offerings may often (but not always) be considerably smaller and made more frequently from other materials such as thin sheets of silver or tin and even plastic, although some continue to be carved from wood or moulded from clay by hand or with the aid of a mould. What becomes clear is that even today there is no singular way to produce an anatomical votive, nor indeed has there ever been.

In ancient contexts objects identified as anatomical *ex-votos* are frequently carved or moulded in relief on stone or clay plaques, but might also be fashioned in the round using terracotta, metal, wood, wax or ivory, with or without an accompanying inscription. In the case of some stone reliefs, largely from Greek contexts, multiple different body parts might be displayed either as a group or as individual parts and some even include images of the human dedicant and/or the divine recipient themselves (Forsén, 2004). Probably the most well-known example of the latter is the late fourth century BC stone relief found in association with the sanctuary of Amynos the hero-physician at Athens shown on the cover of this volume (National Museum of Athens, inv. 3526). An inscription names the dedicator as Lysimachides son of Lysimachos from Acharnai and the relief image depicts him holding a model of an over life-sized leg with a pronounced (varicose?) vein, alongside two separate feet contained within a recessed panel. With the exception of those from Corinth, the best-known models in the round come from sites in Italy and where the majority of surviving examples are made not from stone but from fired clay (for an introductory overview see Recke, 2013). However, substantial numbers of three-dimensional anatomical votives from Italy and the western part of the Roman world were also made from bronze or silver (either cast or in the form of thin sheets) and sometimes, more rarely, from gold (for instance the pair of sheet-gold relief eyes recovered from the baths-basilica complex at Roman Wroxeter in Britain: Painter, 1971). Ancient anatomical votives can also be life-sized and miniaturised, or indeed any size in between. Over life-sized models in the round seem to have been produced rarely, although the example of Lysimachides cautions against the assumption that this was completely unknown and the nature of the evidence may mean that such items are easily mistaken for fragments of broken statuary or temple decoration.

This volume seeks to infiltrate these cracks within definitions of ‘the anatomical votive’. The intention is to move treatments of ancient votive artefacts and assemblages away from a

narrow focus on typological characteristics towards a greater understanding of how these objects were used and manipulated in a range of cultural, cultic and curative contexts both past and present, as well as the meanings and knowledge associated with and produced by their use. In order to do this individual chapters adopt diverse but compatible approaches, investigating the motivations which led to the dedication of offerings which reference directly the human body and the meanings and significance attached to these activities; the ways in which anatomical votives as objects with agency were used, viewed and engaged with and the contexts in which this occurred; the nature of the relationship between anatomical *ex-votos*, concepts of the body, religious experience, medicine and divine healing; and the anatomical votive as part of a commemorative or curated assemblage. Accordingly, the chapters in this volume re-contextualise and re-conceptualise these apparently familiar artefacts, broadening the traditional parameters of votive studies to include material, ideas and themes which are not regularly integrated into these analyses, including questions of reception and theoretical models derived from anthropological studies of religious materialities and body theory. They ask new questions about exactly where the boundaries circumscribing definitions of ‘the anatomical votive’ lie, pushing against the margins between humans and gods, the body and its disparate parts, divine and medical healing, collections and collectors. Some of the chapters evaluate dedicated objects not defined traditionally as anatomical votives such as confession stelai, footprints and hair, as well as the unfragmented bodies of swaddled infants which sit at the fringes of existing definitions. Others look beyond traditional chronological boundaries in order to consider how anatomical *ex-votos* have continued to have meaning for later generations and in turn how these meanings have generated many of the conceptual boundaries subsequently imposed upon them. Stretching the edges of ‘the anatomical votive’ in this way, integrating these objects within the broader materiality of religious and medical performances, as well as considering



an alternative array of contexts in which the agency of votive objects is significant for the articulation of knowledge concerning the human-divine relationship and the body, makes it possible to problematise the idea of *the* anatomical votive. It also makes it possible to consider how positioning these objects in relation to alternative theoretical and methodological frameworks, examining them from new angles, bringing fresh sources to bear on their interpretation and creating more lenses through which to view them can blur established boundaries and typologies allowing their complex properties as multivalent objects to come into greater focus.

### **Getting a Head: Votive Practice in Ancient Contexts**

Before going much further, however, we must address briefly the issue of terminology and context against which all of these chapters are set, beginning with the term *ex-voto* and the nature of votive religion in the ancient world. Contributors to this volume focus primarily, although not exclusively, on objects, practices and contexts associated with Greek and Italic/Roman culture but providing a catch-all definition of votive cult can prove troublesome even for regions and cultural groups known to share at least some cultural and religious connections. The terminology used to write about votive practice – indeed the term ‘votive’ itself – is derived largely from textual and epigraphic sources of the Roman period and later. This imposes, intentionally or unintentionally, a degree of homogeneity on a type of ritual practice and material culture that might well involve considerable discrepancies in terms of the acts, beliefs, experiences and materialities concerned. Nonetheless, the use of standardised terminology also has its benefits, making it possible write about a type of activity – and a category of object – which finds distinctive expression across space and time and to identify and explore notable points of intersection and divergence from more general sequences of activities and practices.

The term *ex-voto*, still used widely in modern contexts, derives from the Latin formulation whereby a human seeks support, assistance, protection or some other form of specific intervention by means of a direct request or petition made to a divine figure (or figures) and vows to offer something in return if that request is fulfilled (Osborne, 2004; Frateantonio, 2006; Dasen, 2012; Hahn, 2012). The term itself is associated with the second part of this process, the vow (*votum*) that an offering would be made in return for a successful petition. This could be made in relation to everything from personal well-being to the security of a public figure or the Roman imperial family, on either an *ad hoc* basis or as part of a recurrent periodic vow connected with public religion or stages of the life-course (van Straten, 1981, pp. 88–102; Rüpke, 2007, p. 163; Derks, 2014, pp. 59–65). It was this return offering which in Latin was known as an *ex-voto*, commonly anglicised today as ‘votive’ (for more on the technicalities of votive terminology see van Straten, 1981; Bodel, 2009). Sometimes this formal relationship is framed as *da ut dem* (‘give so that I may give’), providing a powerful reminder of the reciprocal but formal relationship which lay at the heart of this process of negotiation (Hahn, 2012). However, as Rüpke (2007, p. 163) has pointed out, the gods need not uphold their side of the bargain and ‘there were no strings attached: the outcome was open.’ If this remained the case then there was also no compulsion to make a return gift, meaning, of course, that ‘failed vows produce no votives; the system renders its failures invisible’ (Rüpke, 2007, p. 164). Nevertheless, the frequency with which objects recovered from sanctuaries, temples, shrines and other sacred places attest to the dedication of items which appear to offer thanks for an answer received or the successful completion of a vow suggests that this process was often considered to have been completed satisfactorily.

The underpinning principles of votive activities, comprising an initial request (probably via a spoken prayer) accompanied by a vow and the promise of a thank offering followed by a prayer of thanks and the gift itself, can therefore be established with a reasonable degree of

confidence (Rives, 2007, pp. 24–5). Sometimes Greek terms are used in modern scholarship to refer to these different stages, including *euchomai* (spoken prayer), *euchē* (vow) and *anathema* (votive gift), but the terms used most commonly to write about this type of religious performance tend to be Latin. They therefore promote a rather Romano-centric formulation of a type of ritual activity that had existed in the ancient Mediterranean for millennia before these terms came into use, even if it is widely accepted that they do offer a useful way of describing the broad outline of this long-lasting tradition. It is, therefore, necessary to remember that a Greek person of the fourth century BC making their offering in thanks to Asclepius at Athens, Corinth or any other healing figure at another sacred site would not have articulated their actions using these words even if, as epigraphic sources attest, the same recognisable process of making a thank-offering was followed (for instance, the public expressions of thanks and offerings described in inscriptions at the Asclepieion of Epidaurus: *IG IV*<sup>2</sup> 1, 121–4; Edelstein and Edelstein, 1945 and 1998; LiDonnici, 1992).

The offerings dedicated to commemorate successful vows include the anatomical votives which are the focus of this volume but also encompassed a range of other dedications, the least ambiguous of which were accompanied by Latin inscriptions employing the revealing phrase *votum solvit libens merito* (‘has fulfilled his vow willingly and with good reason’) (Turfa, 2006a, p. 91; Rüpke, 2007, pp. 164–5). Offerings might vary not only in terms of their materiality – bronze, silver, gold, ceramic, terracotta and most probably wax and wood, perhaps also fabrics, foodstuffs, liquids and animal sacrifice – but also their form (van Straten, 1981 remains a useful overview of different types of offering across the ancient world; see also Rouse, 1902; Forsén, 1996; Turfa, 2006a). *Donaria* could be intended to be durable or ephemeral, or they might comprise objects used in daily life and subsequently surrendered to the gods. Commonly cited examples of the latter include dolls given up on the occasion of marriage and the tools of retired craftsmen (*Palatine Anthology* 4.103–4; van

Straten, 1981, pp. 89–96). Alternatively they might take the form of purpose-made models, vessels or figurines (for miniature votive offerings see Kiernan, 2009). Indeed, the range of possibilities is endless and the opportunities for individuality unlimited as petitioners chose to dedicate items which were meaningful to them, just as visitors to modern holy sites continue to do today. A comprehensive survey of all votive practice across the length and breadth of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean and its bordering regions is inappropriate in this context, but it should not be forgotten that the anatomical votives singled out for discussion here were part of this considerably larger phenomenon of dedicated objects and a tradition which encompassed a high degree of convention but also creativity.

Challenges arise when attempting to reconstruct and explain the nuances of these shared activities, especially because so few written accounts of votive rituals survive and interpretations must rely heavily on surviving material culture. What is more, by its very nature this evidence represents only one act – and the final one at that – in a potentially protracted sequence of activities. In most instances it can be assumed that the material offerings recovered from sacred sites were dedicated at the end of the petitioning process as a gift of thanks to the deity in question and that they are by definition true *ex-votos*. Indeed, this behaviour is precisely what is attested in epigraphic evidence such as that provided by the inscribed Epidauran *iamata* (tales of miracle cures) and later inscriptions from Pergamum (Edelstein and Edelstein, 1945 and 1998; Petsalis-Diomidis, 2010). It remains possible that gifts were also given in association with the prayer spoken on the occasion of the initial petition perhaps as a means of formalising the relationship and a demonstration of appropriate respect for divine power. It is not impossible to imagine that a less durable offering might be an appropriate accompaniment to this initial request: food or a libation, something that was tangible but transient which might deteriorate or disperse before any final offering was made as a way of embodying the passing of time or the ephemeral nature of the

spoken prayer, even a way of ensuring that the god did not receive more than they were due as part of the ‘no strings attached’ nature of the vow.

The nature of anatomical votives has prompted further speculation about the point at which offerings were made. Their potential to draw attention to an afflicted, diseased or injured part of the body and therefore to the specific request that was being made of the god, even to act as a ‘visual’ reminder of the anticipated outcome, has led to the suggestion that in some circumstances they were dedicated along with the initial request for divine assistance or cure (see discussion in Schultz, 2006, pp. 102–5). There is no corroborative evidence for this and the absence of pathological indications on the majority of anatomical votives suggests that this was at least not typical (Turfa, 2004, p. 360–61; de Cazanove, 2009). Jean Turfa (2006b) has also questioned whether it was even possible for petitioners suffering from incapacitating illness or disease to travel to the site of shrines and sanctuaries which in many Italian cases were located in inaccessible locations or at a considerable distance from settlement centres. Not only does this seem to preclude the presence of hospitals and treatment centres – in contrast to the major healing sanctuaries of the eastern Mediterranean, including Pergamum – but she argues that it also suggests that most dedicants visited sacred sites only when they had become well enough to do so (Turfa, 2006b, p. 72 and p. 79). Observations such as this raise broader questions about the nature of ancient pilgrimage and the fact that the difficult journey undertaken to reach a sanctuary as well as movement around it upon arrival might form a crucial part of the supplicant’s ‘offering’ of worship and thanks to a deity (for healing pilgrimage see Petsalis-Diomidis, 2005; 2006; 2010; on pilgrimage more generally see chapters in Elsner and Rutherford, 2005). Perhaps, therefore, we should conceptualise the process of making offerings as a more protracted one involving multiple dedications of differing type, both material and immaterial. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the timing of offerings of discrete types may have been connected directly with

the specific nature of the request, or indeed of the offering itself, as chapters in this volume make clear (Glinister on infant socialisation and Petridou on eyes as a testament to mysteric enlightenment).

### **On the One Hand: Studying Anatomical Votives**

Bridging the spheres of religion, medicine, the body and reception studies as well as very specialist coroplastic and regional-based fields the anatomical votive sits comfortably in multiple categories. In fact they are in one sense quite well known: visually evocative examples are often used to illustrate general discussions of ancient votive practice or ‘name-checked’ as a particularly striking and intriguing example of the type of object that might be given to ancient gods. They are also popular features of museum cabinets where they are connected with topics including ancient medicine and religion (see the discussion of Case 3 in the Greek and Roman Life gallery at the British Museum in the chapter by Adams).

The first academic interest in anatomical votives was expressed by the Paduan bishop and intellectual Giacomo Filippo Tomasini who published his *De donariis ac tabellis votivis liber singularis* in 1639 (Hughes, forthcoming). In this work he discussed a range of *donaria* made to the gods of ancient Italy including anatomical ones.<sup>1</sup> However, more serious interest in these objects – the scholarly importance of which was diminished for a long period of time in favour of more traditional forms of classical sculpture and ‘high art’ (see Adams, this volume) – began in the early twentieth century and has slowly gathered pace. Most notably, for the Greek world influential syntheses range from the early work of William Rouse (1902) to that of Folkert van Straten (1981) and more recently Björn Forsén (1996), supplemented by important if now somewhat dated site-specific studies including those of the Asclepieia at

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<sup>1</sup> We are very grateful to Jessica Hughes for bringing this early work to our attention.

Athens (Aleshire, 1989; 1991), Corinth (Roebuck, 1951; Lang, 1977) and Epidaurus (Edelstein and Edelstein, 1945 and 1998; Dillon 1994). For Italian contexts general surveys by Maria Fenelli (1975; 1992; 1995) and Annamaria Comella (1981) and regional studies such as that of sites in Latium by Jelle Bouma (1996) continue to be influential. These are now supplemented by the *Corpus delle stipe votive in Italia*, which is an ongoing series of site publications with a standardised series of types and categories which have brought about the systematic publication of many assemblages excavated in the twentieth century (and earlier) which had previously lain unstudied or at least unpublished. Some newly identified sites including those where the integrity of the assemblage is threatened by the activities of *clandestini* have also been published recently (De Lucia Brolli and Tabolli, 2015).

Nonetheless, and especially for Italian contexts where anatomical votives were often made in series, these approaches have tended to lend themselves to the establishment of typologies and categorisations rather than analytical discourses. As a consequence many studies still focus on the groups, patterns and connections produced by these works as well as individual site studies and the identification of tutelary deities often at the expense of an evaluation of the wider context. Important though they are the major surveys outlined above also promote a way of thinking which remains grounded in the counting of particular ‘types’ (examples include Potter and Wells, 1985; Fridh-Haneson, 1987; Oberhelman, 2014). Perspectives on the anatomical votive as a cross-cultural phenomenon, including its chronological nuances and the implications for changing ideas about healing, cult practice and the divine and human body have been more rare (Linders and Nordquist, 1987; Weinryb, 2015; Hughes, forthcoming).

[Insert Figure I.4 here – portrait]

Figure I.4      Marble votive relief depicting a pair of ears accompanied by a dedicatory inscription stating that the dedication was made by Cutius Gallus in thanks for healing. Epidaurus, Roman period.

*Source:* Image courtesy of G. Bissas.

In all of these studies it is possible to identify a series of consistent themes which have underpinned and thus been responsible for shaping existing approaches to anatomical *ex-votos*. The impact of these is evaluated, often critically, in the context of the individual chapters of this volume but as themes which have to date provided the driving force for studies of anatomical votives it is necessary to pause briefly to review this background. Unsurprisingly, given the clear reference that these offerings make to the human body and its constituent parts, one of the most common contexts in which the anatomical votive is set is that of ancient medicine, health and healing cult (the literature is vast but includes: Comella, 1982–83; Potter and Wells, 1985; Girardon, 1993; Baggieri, 1999a; de Cazanove, 2008; Turfa, 2004; 2006a; 2006b; Petsalis-Diomidis, 2005; 2006; 2010; Edlund-Berry, 2006; Oberhelman, 2013; Recke, 2013; Turfa and Becker, 2013; Draycott, 2014; Flemming, forthcoming a). Indeed, this is entirely logical given that the direct connection between such offerings and the process of divine healing is often made explicit by the evidence itself (Figure I.4). Under this umbrella of healing, the cult of Asclepius has proved particularly dominant, especially for studies of the eastern Mediterranean and the Greek world where the association between anatomical *ex-votos* and the healing god is well attested (Lang, 1977; Rynearson, 2003; Wickkiser, 2008). The same is not true, however, for Italy where there are relatively few sites which can be definitively connected with the cult of Asclepius and where local deities take centre stage (Coarelli, 1986a; Renberg, 2006–7; Turfa, 2006a). Seen from this standpoint anatomical votives have been looked to as a source of evidence for particular



diseases or medical conditions (for a summary for Etruscan Italy: Recke, 2013, pp. 1075–6; see also the examples of Sambon, 1895a; Stieda, 1901; Holländer, 1912; Fenelli, 1975; Ferrea and Pinna, 1986), for the healing specialisms of particular divine figures and their cults (Oberhelman, 2014) and for the extent and development of medical knowledge concerning the interior and exterior of the human body (examples include Baggieri, 1998; 1999; Turfa, 2004; Turfa and Becker, 2013). In some instances this medical context is combined with related issues concerning human reproduction, fertility, pregnancy, birth, motherhood and infant health, especially in relation to votives which reference the uterus or genitals as well as swaddled babies and more rare Italian examples depicting the pregnant torso (Baggieri, et al., 1999b; Ammerman, 2007; Turfa, 2004; de Cazanove, 2008; Derks, 2014; Graham, 2013; 2014).

Healing and medical contexts dominate scholarship on the anatomical votive but the fact that these offerings were an integral part of religious ritual has not been overlooked. Votives which reference the human form are studied frequently as significant features of sacred sites and as part of a broader tradition of religious practice (in addition to the general studies noted above see Linders and Nordquist, 1987; de Cazanove, 1991; Fabbri 2004–05; Comella and Mele, 2005; Gleba and Becker, 2009; de Grummond and Edlund-Berry, 2011). In recent years a range of other approaches have also begun to be applied to the study of these artefacts. These include body theory, sensory experience and material religion (Hughes, 2008; 2010; 2015; forthcoming; Graham, 2014; forthcoming a; forthcoming b; Draycott, forthcoming), art and gender (Johns, 1982; Bonfante, 1986; 1989; 1997; Reilly, 1997; Schultz 2006), ‘Romanisation’ and cultural interaction (de Cazanove, 2000; Glinister, 2000; 2006; 2009) as well as more restricted surveys of individual sites and geographical regions (Blagg, 1985; Comella, 2002; Melfi, 2007). Given the range of issues and contexts to which anatomical votives can be related, these disparate studies with different approaches and

agendas frequently remain isolated from one another, confined by their own disciplinary, methodological or linguistic boundaries, preventing the creation of a more comprehensive and critical understanding of the anatomical votive as a broader phenomenon. Publication of assemblages excavated many years ago is often slow as newly recovered material takes priority and new studies are hampered by the difficulties of identifying and accessing unpublished (and often simply difficult to find) material held in museum warehouses.

### **A Body of Evidence: Votives in Space and Time**

Like many other types of *donaria* which seem to have been popular at certain moments and in particular regions the anatomical votive was not a constant feature within the votive assemblages of ancient sacred sites. As chapters in this volume demonstrate (most notably de Cazanove's investigation of chronological issues), accurate dating of the phenomenon of anatomical *ex-votos* can be notoriously circular, especially for the anepigraphic models from sites in Italy (just five rare inscribed examples: Turfa, 2004, p. 363; 2006, pp. 101–2).

Although anatomical votives appear to have reached their floruit in Greek contexts during the period covered by the fifth to third centuries BC this estimation is based largely on the evidence from sanctuaries dedicated to Asclepius from which the most substantial evidence derives (Forsén, 2004, p. 311). This evidence takes the form of individual objects from sites including Corinth (Roebuck, 1951) and Pergamum (Radt, 1999; Petsalis-Diomidis, 2010), the famous epigraphic inventories from Athens (Aleshire, 1989; 1991) and the series of inscribed 'miracle tales' (*iamata*) from Epidaurus (Edelstein and Edelstein, 1945 and 1998; LiDonnici, 1992; Dillon, 1994). At sites in Italy anatomical dedications appear slightly later than those in Greece, beginning in the fourth century BC and peaking during the third and second centuries before declining – maybe to be replaced by votives of a different type – by or during the first century BC (Lesk, 1999; 2002; Glinister, 2006, pp. 30–31; Rüpke, 2007; although see the

revised dating presented by de Cazanove, this volume). Not least amongst the new types which gained popularity in the first century BC were commemorative inscriptions which provided different opportunities for memorialising the circumstances and outcome of a vow as well as the identity and social position of the individual concerned (Schultz, 2006, pp. 102–5).

The difficulties associated with dating a series of objects which for the most part are unaccompanied by inscriptions and which are often found in unstratified dumps of material cleared away from their original place of deposition to be buried in pits (sometimes referred to by modern scholars as *favisae*, *stipes* or *bothroi*: Schultz, 2006, p. 97; Glinister, 2000), make it difficult to draw precise conclusions about when and where the concept of dedicating body parts arose (Recke, 2013, p. 1073; de Cazanove, this volume). Regardless of specific dates it would appear that across the Mediterranean region this tradition had peaked and largely faded by the turn of the first millennium, although evidence from Roman-period sites in the Greek East, most notably the Asclepieion at Pergamum where the Roman orator Aelius Aristides spent two years seeking relief from his bodily ailments, suggests that anatomical models and reliefs continued to be dedicated even if in smaller quantities (Radt, 1999; Petsalis-Diomidis, 2010). Moreover, artefacts recovered from sites in Gaul attest to the continuity of this practice in other regions of the Roman empire (Deyts, 1983; 1994; Rey-Vodoz, 1991; 2006; de Cazanove, this volume). Indeed, the fact that traces, or at least the memory of such practices remained into late antiquity is attested by the description given by Gregory of Tours of ‘barbarians’ of a previous age dedicating wooden models of body parts ‘touched by pain’ (*Vitae patrum* VI.2 *De sancto Gallo episcopo*; cited in Hughes, forthcoming). As already observed the descendants of these early anatomical objects are still dedicated across regions of modern Europe and further afield where largely Catholic and Orthodox faiths prevail, indicating that the compulsion to make offerings in the form of body

parts has never completely disappeared even if the form, materiality and ritual context has undergone a number of changes (Cole and Zorach, 2009; Weinryb, 2015; Hughes, forthcoming). It is more difficult, not to mention inappropriate, to connect the anatomical votives of other World Religions explicitly with this Mediterranean heritage.

### **On the Other Hand: New Approaches**

The apparent continuity or correspondence of practice implied by the ongoing dedication of offerings which are so strikingly similar to those of the ancient world and which apparently serve a similar function – that is, as part of a negotiation for divine assistance in many cases connected with concerns about well-being, health and the inherent fragility of the human body – creates at best a sense of comfortable familiarity and at worst one of complacency about their seemingly ‘obvious’ and uncomplicated meanings (for instance, Capparoni, 1927). In other words, if we understand why a modern Catholic or Hindu might dedicate an anatomical *ex-voto* then surely we can easily transfer that same understanding back into the past? Can we not use this knowledge to draw direct parallels with much older objects that were evidently articulating similar concerns? Unfortunately not. Even in ancient contexts it is evident that discrete types of anatomical votives might be associated with a range of meanings (see chapters by Draycott, Chiarini, Flemming, Graham, Petridou and Potts). What is more, this process of meaning-making was one which extended also to the later stages in the biography of these dedicated objects as they became collected, curated and even created in new contexts (chapters by Haumesser, Adams, Grove and Hughes). In order to tease apart these meanings it is necessary to acknowledge that anatomical votives could, and still can be, multivalent and that simple categorisation based on the fact that an object references the human body is not sufficient in order to really understand its significance as a material agent within religious, curative and even social activities. Appreciating this encourages new

questions: were different types of anatomical votive implicated in different types of activity or used in context-specific ways? How did the experience of dedicating an anatomical votive differ from that of making an offering in another form, perhaps a coin, a libation or an inscription? How important was the materiality of these objects and their interaction with the senses for creating religious experiences and knowledge? Not all of these questions are answered in the current volume but the chapters presented here offer new perspectives which encourage the development of alternative questions such as these which, we hope, will move studies of anatomical votives in increasingly original and exciting directions.

Where this volume differs from existing studies, then, is that each chapter seeks to go beyond a mere catalogue of what, where and when in order to consider how these often quite varied artefacts were used, understood, experienced and were part of a broader material process of negotiation between communities composed of humans and the divine. How do they address the questions and concerns held by ancient (and some modern) people about their lives, health, bodies, fortunes and futures or about the nature of the gods, their identities and their curative powers? What is more, how do our evaluations of these questions change when we extend our perspective to include curated assemblages such as those put together by Sir Henry Wellcome? What roles do these objects, and most importantly ongoing interaction with them, have to play in the creation of bodily knowledge and understanding amongst much later generations? As a result, the chapters of this volume aim to emphasise the necessity of bringing studies of the anatomical votive into line with recent developments in related scholarship in the field of body studies within both the disciplines of archaeology and ancient medicine as well as broader movements including the material turn of religious studies.

[Insert Figure I.5 here – portrait]

Figure I.5      Three Italian votive heads of unknown provenance.

*Source:* Wellcome Library, London.

There are, nonetheless, some caveats to this. Despite chapters which deal with specific types – eyes, hair, footprints, uteri, infants, open torsos, genitalia – this volume does not claim to provide a comprehensive ‘head to toe’ survey of ancient votive practice. Instead, the case studies included here have been selected because of the opportunities they present to debate questions about how to define, study and understand the anatomical votive phenomenon. There remain significant lacunae in the study of anatomical *ex-votos* as a whole, not just within this volume. Models of hands are one example whilst the votive heads of Italy which take the form of relief plaques and busts (Figure I.5) as well as distinctive half-heads are another notable absence from the papers presented here. These heads have certainly not gone unstudied and have proved crucial for providing chronological data for votive assemblages (Söderlind, 2002) as well as making a vital contribution to debates concerning the connection between votive cult and cultural interaction between Rome and the peoples of Italy (de Cazanove, 2000; Glinister, 2006; 2009). However, in many ways these objects remain – pun intended – out on a limb in terms of their integration into studies of anatomical votives. Their similarity to other forms of plastic art including freestanding sculpture, the favoured topic of traditional classical archaeology, is perhaps responsible for focusing attention on the characteristics of their production and form and on questions of prototypes and artistic development rather than their meaning and significance as dedicated objects. Examples of heads were included in the discussions which took place during the original *Bodies of Evidence* conference in Rome (including the half-head finds from Fidenae discussed by Letizia Ceccarelli) and feature in the chapter by Draycott, but it is notable that none of the abstracts submitted for the conference or the papers presented focused

exclusively on heads or half-heads as ‘anatomical’ votives. Whether this was nothing more than a coincidence or whether it was a result of a more widely held understanding that heads should not be considered ‘anatomical’ in the same way as limbs, feet or uteri remains unclear (Figure I.6). Questions might be asked, then, about the extent to which the ideas about fragmentation, religious knowledge and healing can be usefully applied to this abundant and well-recorded material as well as all of the many other types not included in this volume such as legs, hands and other more uncertainly identified internal organs (such as bladders and hearts).

[Insert Figure I.6 here – portrait]

Figure I.6 Wax body parts for sale as votive offerings at the modern religious centre of Aparecida, Brazil. Note that heads are included alongside limbs as they were also in ancient contexts: are they both ‘anatomical’?

*Source:* Wikimedia Commons. Author: Alexandrepastre.

### **An Eye on the Future**

By focusing exclusively on one type of offering – although not at the expense of the wider context in which they must remain situated – this book therefore brings together for the first time a range of deliberately diverse approaches in order to challenge the simplistic categorisation applied to anatomical *ex-votos*. The volume does not attempt to situate the anatomical votive wholly in the context of either ancient religion or health/medicine but instead exploits the interpretive potential of the intersection of these spheres, a complicated intersection that undoubtedly existed in the minds, bodies and experiences of past communities. In order to achieve this chapters juxtapose the medical with the religious, the social with the conceptual, the idea of the body in fragments with the body whole, the

museum with the sanctuary. The contributors consider a wide variety of examples, contexts and approaches but are united in their concern for exploring the complex resonance of the anatomical *ex-voto* for the people who produced, deposited or otherwise encountered them in both the distant and more recent past.

Just as the open torsos examined by Haumesser provide us with a view of the somatic interior of a terracotta body whilst their organs remain firmly contextualised within the bigger picture of its exterior we hope that the different scales of analysis presented by this volume will make it possible to view the bigger – and indeed sometimes the smaller – picture of anatomical votives in new ways. The structure of the volume has been designed to emphasise this, moving between studies focused largely on methodological approaches and theoretical questions, those which address specific types of anatomical votive and chapters which consider how understandings of votives intersect with their later history and reception as collected objects. Nevertheless, the boundaries between these categories are deliberately fluid. Laurent Haumesser's study of 'The Open Man' demonstrates how evaluations of specific types of anatomical *ex-voto* – even in this case specific individual artefacts – must also take place with due regard to the history of an object and its own biography. Equally, Olivier de Cazanove argues that issues of chronology and methodology must remain rooted in the close analysis of specific votive types, just as Fay Glinister raises questions about what constitutes an anatomical votive by reminding us that the sum of parts can be as important as their dismemberment. From this perspective a swaddled infant votive is as anatomical as the confession stelai examined by Justine Potts, the uteri studied by Rebecca Flemming or the real and artificial hair offerings evaluated by Jane Draycott. The role of anatomical votives in the production of religious knowledge and experience for participants in ancient ritual activities also requires new theoretical standpoints which seek to offer fresh interpretative frameworks such as those advocated by Emma-Jayne Graham, as well as detailed studies of



specific types of offering including the different meanings attached to footprints by Sara Chiarini and eye votives by Georgia Petridou. Chapters by Laurent Haumesser, Ellen Adams and Jen Grove, on the other hand, emphasise the value of bringing together these interpretations with searching examinations of how such objects have continued to be used, collected and studied. In these instances disentangling the ancient and the modern is neither appropriate nor especially valuable as the Afterword by Jessica Hughes concludes.

So why does the anatomical votive fascinate? The papers collected here suggest that it is perhaps because there are so many ways in which we might understand them. They complicate our view of how the people of the past experienced not only their relationship with the divine world but also their own bodies, as well how later generations have sought to make sense of this. Perhaps too it is because these objects with their easily recognisable configuration of a human body with which we are all so familiar provide a tangible connection with ancient people in a way that a fragment of pottery or a well-worn coin cannot. Anatomical votives capture the imagination vividly and creatively at the same as they recall the very real, physical and fragile bodies of the past. And even if only for this they deserve our undivided attention.